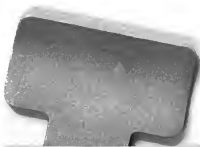


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MAGINARY CONVERSATION

OF

KING CARLO-ALBERTO

AND

THE DUCHESS BELGIOIOSO,

ON

THE AFFAIRS AND PROSPECTS

OF

ITALY:

BY WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR.



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to the sufferers at Messina.

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La Guerra del Vespro Siciliano per Michele Amari. 1843.

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Michele
Sondaggio H2

PRINTED BY MEYLER AND SON, BATH.

IMAGINARY CONVERSATION.

KING CARLO-ALBERTO AND PRINCESS BELGIOIOSO.

King. Permit me, Princess, to offer you my compliment on your entering a new career of conquest. When ladies of such rank and accomplishments condescend to lead the brave volunteers of Lombardy, good fortune must follow.

Princess. Excuse me, sir, it is far from condescension in me. On the contrary, I feel it to be an act of self-elevation; I hope a pardonable one. I was never proud until now; for never was I so well aware of my duties, and so resolved to perform them.

King. Flattery, wealth, station, beauty, were in a conspiracy against you. Surely it was a difficult matter to resist their united forces.

Princess. Each of these contingencies has many disadvantages, which its parallel advantages make us too often overlook. The best of men and women have to fill up certain gaps, or certain discontinuities, in their character. Here is a field for it.

King. I enter it willingly.

Princess. Italy, sir, had always her eyes on you : she once abased them in deep sorrow : her confidence now returns. Only one man upon earth enjoys power equal to yours : behold how he employs it...the calm, the prudent, the beneficent, the energetic, Pio Nono. At your suggestion all the Potentates of Italy would engage in their service a proportionate force of Swiss. Your Majesty and the King of Naples could each afford to subsidize twelve thousand for a single year, a second will not be necessary for the expulsion of the Austrians. It is better to accomplish the great work without the intervention of France, which would create much jealousy in Germany and in England. \

King. I would rather not see the French again in Piedemont. Already the apprehension of such an event has induced Lord Palmerston to make me a strong remonstrance.

Princess. Sir, Lord Palmerston has lately been very much in the habit of making strong remonstrances ; and strong ridicule has always rebounded to the racket. It was only this week that he made one of his strong remonstrances to the Government of Spain ; which strong remonstrance was thrown back in his teeth (if he has any left) with derision and defiance. Navaez stood aloof with folded arms, and left him to be buffeted and beaten down by poor old Sottomayor. His conduct in regard to Portugal has alienated from England all the liberals.

King. Are there many of them in that country ? and are they persons of consideration and respectability ?

Princess. Many of the clergy, both lower and higher ; nearly all the principal merchants ; and not only the best informed, but also the larger part of the nobility ; just as they are in ours.

King. I wonder what could have induced his lordship to abandon his policy and principles ?

Princess. Sir, he abandoned no policy, no principles ; his lordship is a Whig : these Whigs have neither : protestations serve instead.

King. It must be conceded that, in the multiplicity of parties and interests, and in the conciliation and management of the two Houses, an English minister is placed in circumstances of great difficulty, and where strict integrity is quite impossible.

Princess. What is to be thought of that man's wisdom or prudence who walks deliberately, and with his eyes open, into those circumstances ?

King. Simpler governments have produced honestest ministers than the complex. England has never seen her Colbert, her Turgot, her Necker, her Roland. In the course of the last eighty years her only minister on whom there was the slightest suspicion of sound principles, was the Marquis of

Rockingham, patron of the celebrated Burke. The King never spoke with cordiality to him, excepting on the day of his dismissal. If Lord Palmerston miscarries, it will not be for incompiancy to the wishes of the Court: he has obtained a firm footing there by trampling on Portugal. But as Austria is no fief of Saxony, he might permit me to regulate my own concerns, and not attempt to trip me up in crossing the frontier.

Princess. Your Majesty is defending your own country in defending Italy, and you do not cross the frontier until you cross the Alps. It may be necessary; for certain I am that the Emperor of Austria and the King of Prussia are awaiting with earnest anxiety to meet the advance of the Russian armies.

King. They would ruin Hungary and the Baltic provinces.

Princess. The more welcome for that. By such devastation the power of resistance would be annihilated in the refractory. Posen has already been treated like Oporto.

King. You appear to doubt the Prussian king's sincerity.

Princess. If his Majesty is an honest man, it is a great deal more than his father and his grandfather were; and indeed to find any such character in the

archives of Hohenzollern would require an antiquary the most zealous and the most acute. Certainly in the last reign the heir to the throne was considered to be more anti-democratic than the possessor : and since his accession what he has conceded to the people came from him as an emanation of power and wisdom on indigence and imbecility. There are professors in Germany who declare that the kings and upper classes must be taught a purer language, not without an infusion of neology.

King. Princess ! you must acknowledge that kings, at the present day, are placed in an embarrassing situation : I among the rest.

Princess. Then extricate yourself, sir, speedily, Unless it is speedily, it will never be. You may recover all you have lost of popularity and renown, by valour and determination. Your countryman Alfieri was correct in his assertion that the Italians, both in mental and corporeal power, are superior to all the nations round about. They want only good examples and liberal institutions.

King. I am afraid, Princess, you want a Napoleon and a Republic.

Princess. If I desired the existence of the one, I must desire the extinction of the other. Napoleon would permit no other freedom than his own personal. Never did any sovereign, not Louis Philip himself,

so belie his protestations: never did any one enact so many laws restrictive of freedom in so many of its attributes. The most arbitrary of despots never issued so great a quantity of edicts against the press. Not only was it a crime to call in question any of his actions, but it also was one to omit the praise of them. Madame de Stael was exiled for it, and an impression of her work on Germany seized by the police, condemning her thereby to a loss of twenty thousand francs. Military men, especially those who believe that all honour lies in the field of battle, may admire him; but they who abhor selfishness, malice, and (what we women think a crime) vulgarity, abhor Napoleon. He did, however, good service to Italy, be the motive what it may, in extirpating the Bourbons, sticking in again only one weak twig which never could take root.

King. You see then with satisfaction the difficulties which beset the King of Naples.

Princess. Certainly; and so does your Majesty. It is necessary to expel that family from the nations it has humiliated, from the thrones it has disgraced. The Sicilians, the best of our Italian races, have decreed it.

King. Kings must not place it in the power of the people to decide on their destiny.

Princess. Kings do not place it in their power,

but God does. Kings themselves begin the work of delving under their palaces and preparing the combustibles for explosion. They never know where they are, until they find themselves blown into some foreign land. The head grows cooler when the crown is off: yet they would run again after it, as a little girl after her bonnet which a breeze is rolling in the dust.

King. I am half persuaded that the little girl's loss is the gravest, and that she is the wiser of the two runners.

Princess. Your Majesty has inspired me with confidence to proceed in speaking out plainly. You are now in my country, and you can save it. Unless you do, you will lead an unhappy life; if you do, a happy one. Security of dominion is desirable, not extent. There are those who whisper, what I never can believe, that your Majesty is ambitious of being the King of Lombardy. Supposing it practicable, do you imagine that the people of Turin will be contented to see the seat of government transferred to Milan, or that the rich and noble and ancient families of Milan will submit to become the footstools of the Turinese? Never, sir, never.

King. Would you have the whole world republican?

Princess. In due time: at the present, few

nations are prepared for it : the best prepared is the Italian. Every one of our cities shows the deep traces of its *carroccio*, and many still retain their municipality and their *podestà*. I see no reason why they should not all be restored to their pristine state and vigour, all equally subject to one strict confederation. The causes of their dissidence and decline exist no longer. The Emperor is a powerless creature, tied by the leg to a worm-eaten throne. The Pope, reposing on the bosom of GOD, inspires the purest devotion, the sublimest virtue. He reigns in the hearts of the most irreligious, and exerts over the most obstinate the authority of paternal love. I have seen proud scoffers lower their heads at the mention of his name : I have heard cold philosophers say, with the hand upon the breast, *This man is truly GOD's vicegerent*. Pio Nono is with Italy. One shake of the hand-bell on his table would arouse fifty millions of our co-religionists.

King. Our family hath always looked up with reverence to the Popes : and without the countenance of Pio Nono toward my people I should perhaps have been slower in approval of their demonstrations.

Princess. The English ministry sent over a worthy man to warn the Pope of his danger in giving so much encouragement to the liberals. Pio smiled with his usual benignity. He felt that it was not in man to order the sun to stop or the stars to slacken their courses. The plenipotentiary, in the plenitude

of his potentiality, could do nothing at Rome ; and he struggled with like ill success in the straits of Scylla and Carybdis.

King. It is piteous to observe with how little wisdom and probity the affairs of England are conducted. She hath utterly lost all her influence in Europe. She can not hold her nearest dependencies : her remoter drop off, one after another, and grow strong from that moment. The preservation of her territories in the two Indies, extensive, fertile, wealthy as they are, brings only debt upon her.

Princess. Pardon me, Sir, it does much more than that : it not only exhausts her treasures, but, between America and Africa, it consumes several thousands of soldiers and sailors yearly.

King. Yet England enjoys a free constitution and wise laws.

Princess. So it is said by the framers, whose families are cloathed and fed by them : I can only judge by facts. Mythologists tell us that stones were turned into men. Perhaps the same metamorphosis may be enacted in England.

King. It was even less probable at Vienna.

Princess. The blow of the hammer which struck out the kindling spark was given here in Italy.

King. Events may come too suddenly.

Princess. Knowing this, we should be as well prepared as we can be. I myself am a witness to the suddenness of events. One day I was walking on a wide waste in the *maremma* of Tuscany : the next, by enterprise and industry, were excavated the magnificent structures of ancient days. Thus suddenly hath all Italy come forth from sterility to within sight of her glorious institutions.

King. Ah princess ! you make me smile. Those tombs which you mention did indeed open again ; but it was only to show the semblances of kings.

Princess. Sir ! in one moment they had been visible and had disappeared ; in one moment the crown was on their heads and off again ; it was lifted up, and only dust was under : but the works of art, of genius, shone down on them bright as ever. It is lamentable that kings should be less powerful than artificers ; they might be greatly more so, and without the exertion of labour or the expenditure of apprenticeship.

King. Lamentable it may be ; but is it not equally that people who call themselves liberals should carp at the first shadow of liberalism in princes ? A celebrated man of the whig party in England, and (by virtue of the office he once held) a member of the

peerage, tried to be at once an Englishman and a Frenchman, a tory and a republican.

Princess. The French minister made him understand his duties ; no minister or man will ever make him perform them. A shallow scholar, an inelegant writer, an awkward orator, he throws himself into the middle of every road where there is the most passing, fond of heat and sunshine as a viper or a flea. In the gazettes he announced his own death, not indeed to excite commiseration, which, if he cared about it, would be hopeless, but curiosity. It is said that foxes, found in places where they had no means of escape, have simulated death : he has had the advantage of being thrown out after detection, and lives to yelp and purloin. Among the whigs themselves there is nowhere to be found so whipt a deserter, so branded an impostor. There is no party which he has not flattered and cajoled, espoused and abandoned. Possessing a variety of talents, without the ability to make a single one available, the learned Lord Stowel said of him on his elevation to office, *He knows a little of everything excepting law.* His lordship might have added, if he had thought such qualities of any importance in his profession, veracity and decorum. He declared it as his opinion that it is the duty of a barrister to defend a client at any expense of truth, even if the crime were shifted off the shoulders of the guilty on the innocent. His opinion was taken by a

man as unscrupulous as himself, to screen a murderer. Two virtuous women were inculpated ; one was only ruined, the other was driven mad. The same turbulent and malicious man insulted the Italian people in the House of Lords, and condemned the interference of your Majesty.

King. I am little surprised at it, and feel less the indignity of this brawler than the insolence of the minister who replied. He said, and it was true although he said it, that he would have prevented my step if he could. Italy, now resolved on free institutions, must look in another direction than toward England.

Princess. She calls upon you, sir, in this crisis of her sufferings. In the old heroic ages one man alone slew many wild beasts : it were strange if, in an age far more heroic, many men should be insufficient to quell a single tame one, with his back broken by a mass of rubbish falling down on him in the den.

King. We must not only think of Austria, but also of the other German potentates. The King of Prussia, fond of managing and intermeddling, and having his own way and walking by the light of his own wisdom, has been forced into liberalism. If his people are prudent, they will not allow him to march, as he proposes, at the head of his army into Poland. He might play the same game as the late king of

Naples played when his parliament gave him permission to leave his metropolis for Vienna. He has clever men about him, men of pliant principles and lanky purses, unreluctant to leave sour-cROUT for French cookery, and to exchange a horn snuff-box for a diamond one with an emperor on the lid. We want experienced diplomatists capable of coping with their sagacity and wariness.

Princess. The less intelligent sometimes baffle them by firmness and integrity. I have seen slender girls support an incredible weight on their heads, because they stood quite upright and walked steadily. The ministers of kings would persuade the world of their wisdom by vacillation and obliquity: one false step, and they are fallen.

King. I see many things to disquiet, and some to endanger me.

Princess. The hearts of great men neither collapse in the hour of personal danger nor ossify in that of public distress. It is not to be dissembled that falsehood in the cause of freedom may be apprehended on the side of Prussia: and it is far from impossible that the Prussian king and the Austrian emperor are waiting with impatience to embrace the Tzar. The massacre of the nobles in Galicia was organized and rewarded at Vienna: the persecution of all classes in Posen is countenanced and commanded at Berlin.

Czartoryski, the humane, the charitable, the moderate, the just, the patriotic, writes thus to the prime minister of that country: *I quit Berlin with a heavy heart. Whatever be the cause, it is a fact, that up to this day not one of the promises made to the inhabitants of the grand-duchy of Posen, by the Prussian government, has been fulfilled.* To what part of its people has that government been true? Stript and scourged by Bonaparte, tear after tear fell through the king's white eyelashes, and promise after promise from his quivering lips. His nation picked him up, dragged him out of the mire, cloaked him anew, and set him on his horse again. Generals are now sent by him into Posen, with conflicting authorities, to sow dissention, and to exasperate the German invader against his generous host. The Prussian is not contented to occupy the house and the land he hath siezed on; he is not contented with an equal share in the administration of laws and taxes; he would split into shreds the country he already has broken into splinters, and would abolish its nationality.

King. Uncertainty in respect to Prussia, which you acknowledge, is enough to make me cautious and deliberate.

Princess. An English poet says that *the woman who deliberates is lost*: it may sometimes be said with equal truth of the general and of the prince. Behold, sir, this beautiful city of Vicenza! Even so small a

place, being so lovely, is worth risking life for ; what then our grand and glorious Italy ! Look down only on the portals of the palaces before us. In Paris and London we creep through a crevice in the wall : here a cavalier finds no difficulty in placing his hand under a lady's elbow, at due distance, and in leading her without bruise or contusion through the crowded hall, to the wide and light staircase, where Heroes, and Gods, and Graces stand forth to welcome them as they ascend. The inanimate world here outvalues the animated elsewhere. It is worth all that remains of life to have lived one year in Italy. No wonder I am enthusiastic: I have lived here many.

King. Many ? you ? the Princess Belgioioso here beside me ? The Graces you speak of seem to contradict you.

Princess. I would rather trust the Heroes, as being nearer at hand.

King. It is a relief to change the subject a little from politics and battles. No subject can support a long continued conversation, excepting love.

Princess. Love also is the fresher for a short excursion. Seldom do I read a dialogue, even by the cleverest author, without a sense of weariness. Sentences cut up into question and answer on grave subjects, into repartee on lighter, are intolerable. Such is the worst method of instructing a child,

or of attracting a man or woman. And there is something very absurd in the supposition that any abstruse question, or matter of deep thought, can be shuffled backward and forward in this off-hand manner. Even where the discourse is upon a subject the most easy and tractable, we are fond of departing from the strait level walk to some narrower alley that diverges out of it : and we always feel the cooler and pleasanter in passing out of one room into another. But the Austrians in Vienna will not allow me to linger here among the orange-trees and myrtles and oleanders of Vicenza, within view of the white uniform. We will revert, sir (with permission) to the serious and substantial.

King. Of the serious I find quite enough ; the substantial, I trust, is somewhere in reserve. My old ministers have perplexed me almost as much as my old allies.

Princess. It is certain that every man in power thinks himself wiser than every man out of power ; and the getting into it seems a sort of warrantry for the surmise. Yet it may so happen that these who look over the chairs, and have no seat themselves, shall see somewhat more of the game and of its chances than the gamblers can. Others may be cooler and more disinterested, who do not climb the ladder with the hod upon their heads, but stand at the bottom of the building, and look up and round.

King. If only a few ladies like you would go into Austria and Hungary, you could dissuade the leaders of those nations from the desire of invading ours.

Princess. What does any gain by it? All must contribute money and men to hold the conquest in subjection. Kings themselves are none the happier or the more powerful for it. A few noble families are enriched, and rendered thereby in a higher condition to dictate to their master.

King. There is something in that.

Princess. The greatest victory, the greatest conquest, never brought more pleasure to the winner than a game of chess or whist. Yet what crimes, what miseries, what mortal anguish, not only in the field of battle, but in the far-off home! what curses! what misgivings of a watchful, a just, and a protecting Providence! The Austrians are little better than meal-magots: but surely the brave Hungarians will espouse our cause, instead of denouncing it. They themselves have been contending for the same, and have won it; not against us, but against the very same enemy. Hungary, Switzerland, Tyrol, are the natural allies of Italy: she wants no other.

King. I am happy to find you delivering this opinion. You have lived much among the French, and perhaps may entertain toward the nation the

sentiments of esteem due only to the best societies. You seem to take it little to heart or to consideration, that, if you stand too near the focus of democracy, the flounces and feathers of nobility may be caught and shriveled.

Princess. In France the titles of nobility are abolished. Important or unimportant, I do not believe the lower orders in Italy will discard the use of them. They address one another as we address your Majesty, by the title of *Signore*. It comprehends alike the lowest and the highest. If a marquis has twenty sons, they are all marquises. Many, indeed most of them, are sadly poor: it is a comfort, no doubt, to receive the whole of the patrimonial title where there is only a fraction of the estate. Already one Italian is on a parity with another. They are the least invidious of mankind, and unite the most of courtesy and cordiality. The scientific and learned, the patriotic and eloquent, are treated in our societies with much higher distinction than persons of birth and title. The French, who have learnt so much from us, have learnt this also; later indeed, but not less perfectly. It will penetrate to Germany and England. In Germany the nobility is ignorant and ancient: in England it is well-informed and new. There are few families in the peerage whose name, even as knight's or gentleman's, existed on the accession of the Tudors. False shame, trying to support and strengthen the

sufferer with a stiff and defiant carriage, snaps asunder the titled new nobility from the untitled old. In our country no clever advocate is caught up by a patron, and seated first in the lower house, presently in the higher. Ancient services to the state, ancient benefits to the people, are the only true and recognized titles of our nobility: those are neither to be taken away nor to be conferred, by a less active hand, a less energetic intellect. I should be what I am whether I were called so or not; the same when my *camariera* has taken off my gown as when she put it on; the insertion or the removal of a pin makes all the difference.

King. This is talking more philosophically than, by what I comprehend of it, men talk generally.

Princess. Few men are ashamed of mounting upon stilts, in order to raise their heads above the multitude. They are most supported when they are most unsteddy, and are most listened to when they speak in a feigned voice through masks.

King. But where there are ladies there should be courts, distinctions, and festivals.

Princess. We ladies of Milan can do extremely well without them. Happy in our circles, in our conversations, in our music, ready to receive instruction and grateful to our instructors, many of us seldom leave the city but for the vintage-season, or leave it

for no further an excursion than to the lake of Como or Varese.

King. It is a comfort to believe that you prefer us to our neighbours, and that France is not about to win you from us. I do confess to you, princess, that the remembrance of what happened in the first revolution disquieted me a little at the early rumours of the last.

Princess. The first French revolution was a very vile *preface* to a very noble volume. Opening the *introduction* to the second, I augur well of its continuation.

King. It is remarkable that the sober-minded Germans should have committed much greater excesses and much more glaring injustice : and it is not only in these countries of ours, but equally in their own, and along the whole extent of the Baltic. It is seldom or never that hounds worry one another while the prey is before them and the huntsmen are sounding the horn. Really and truly I wish you would compose a *manifesto*, which I may address to the Austrians and Hungarians.

Princess. Perhaps in some places there might be an objectionable word.

King. You must be less inflammatory than Lord Palmerston.

Princess. I could neither be more hasty nor more inefficient. Touchwood makes but an indifferent torch.

King. Give us a specimen of appeal.

Princess. It would be like this : " Austrians and Hungarians ! why do you wish to impose on others a yoke which you yourselves have shaken off ? If they whom you persist in your endeavours of reducing to servitude, had attempted the same against *you*, then indeed resentment might warrant you, and retributive justice would be certainly on your side. It may gratify the vanity of a family to exercise dominion over distant states : and the directors of court-pageants may be loth to drop the fruits of patronage. These fruits are paid for with your blood. Of what advantage is it to any citizen of Buda or Vienna to equip an arch-duke and trumpet him forth to Milan ? Extent of territory never made a nation the happier, unless on its own natal soil, giving it room for enterprise and industry. On the contrary, it always hath helped its ruler to become more arbitrary. Supposing you were governed by the wisest, instead of the weakest, in the universe, could he render you more prosperous by sending you from your peaceful homes to scare away order from others ? Hungarians ! is not Hungary wide enough for you ? Austrians ! hath Heaven appointed you to control much greater, much more numerous, much more warlike nations than you ever were : Hungary for instance, and Lombardy ? Be contented to enjoy

a closer union with Moravia and (if she will listen to it) with Bohemia. Leave to Hungary what she will take, whether you will or no, Stiria, Ilyria, and Croatia. You are not a maritime power, and you never can be, for you are without a sea-board ; but Hungarian generosity will open to you the Adriatic as freely as the Danube. Be moderate while moderation can profit you, and you will soon cease to smart under the wounds of war, and to struggle under the burden of debt."

King. This appeal is very impressive, because it terminates at the proper place. Taxation is more intolerable than cruelty and injustice. The purse is a nation's panoply ; and when you strike through it, you wound a vital part. Refusal to reduce it will, within another year, shake the broad and solid edifice of the English constitution, which the socialist and the chartist have assailed in vain. The debts of Italy are light.

Princess. The lands and palaces of the king of Naples would pay off the heaviest : the remainder is barely sufficient to serve as a keystone to consolidate our interests. There are far-sighted men in England who would not gladly see the great debt of that country very much diminished.

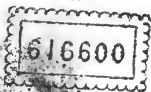
King. Part of ours will disappear now we are no longer to give out rations to the hordes of Austria.

I hope they may be convinced that they can be happier and safer in their own houses than in the houses of other men.

Princess. If they believe, as it seems they do, that they are incapable of governing themselves, and that an idiot is their proper head, let them continue to enjoy the poppy crown, but leave the iron one behind at Monza. Nothing more will be required of them than cöoperation with the other states of Germany against Russia. A force no greater than the peace-establishment will secure the independence and integrity of Poland. Nay, if Germany sends only 150,000 men, Hungary 40,000, Italy 40,000, France 40,000, Russia will break down under them, and Moscow be again her capital. Great states are great curses, both to others and to themselves. One such, however, is necessary to the equipoise of the political world. Poland is the natural barrier of civilization against barbarism, of freedom against despotism. No potentate able to coerce the progress of nations must anywhere exist. All that ever was Poland must again be Poland, and much more. Power, predominant power, is necessary to her for the advantage of Europe. She must be looked up to as an impregnable outwork protecting the nascent liberties of the world.

King. Russia is rich and warlike and hard to manage.

Princess. Her Cossacks might nearly all be detached from her by other means than arms. Her empire will split and splinter into the infinitesimals of which its vast shapeless body is composed. The south breathes against it and it dissolves.



PRINTED BY MEYLER AND SON, BATH.

